DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 190 963 CG 014 610

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TITLE Helping Parents Understand the Findings of Their Child's Psychological Evaluation.
PUB DATE May 80
NOTE 8p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Psychological Association (60th, Honolulu, HI, May 5-9, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Counselor Client Relationship: *Counselor Role: *Parent Attitudes: *Parent Participation: Parents: Perception: *Psychological Evaluation: *Psychological Testing: Psychologists

ABSTRACT

Although the role of a child psychologist has been defined in different ways, a typical pediatric psychologist spends a large amount of time with extensive diagnostic testing, because the psychological report is the ultimate product of the assessment procedure. It is important to determine how those receiving the information from the report view its importance and relevance for the child. However, researchers have not examined the degree to which parents value psychological reports prepared by psychologists. The expectations, concerns, and ideas parents have regarding psychological evaluations were investigated with a sample of parents whose children were seen as out-patients of the Learning and Behavioral Disorders Clinic within the Department of Pediatrics at the UCLA Center for the Health Sciences. All subjects completed a questionnaire about expectations and satisfaction concerning their child's psychological evaluation. Results indicated a readiness and desire on the part of parents to be facilitators of change and to be actively involved in the process of remediation with their children. Findings suggest that the parents not only are passively seeking answers from professionals, but also want to assume an active role. Such a role will necessitate that the psychologist give parents information and supply them with useful strategies and remediation techniques. (Author)

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ED190963

HELPING PARENTS UNDERSTAND THE FINDINGS OF THEIR CHILD'S PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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CG 014610

Paper presented at the Western Psychological Association's Convention, Honolulu, Hawaii, May, 1980.

HELPING PARENTS UNDERSTAND THE FINDINGS OF THEIR CHILD'S PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION

The purpose of this study was to examine the degree to which parents value the information yielded from the psychological evaluations that have been prepared by pediatric psychologists.

In my own clinical work as well as is seen in the research, parental expectations and involvement in the educational process appears to have a direct impact upon their child's learning and development. This impact has been shown to pervade both inside and outside the school classroom itself.

Because parents frequently interact with school counselors, and psychologists, it is important to consider what parental attitudes and expectations are. In that parents are becoming increasingly involved with the "helping" professional staff, their views, ideas and expectations can have a significant impact in terms of how a psychologist is able to facilitate a positive educational and learning experience for the child.

Although the role of a child psychologist has been defined in different ways, a typical pediatric psychologist spends a large amount of time with extensive diagnostic testing. Because the psychological report is the ultimate product of the assessment procedure, it is important to determine how those receiving the information from the report view its importance and relevance for the child. Barclay (1971) found that a large majority of teachers felt that the work performed by school psychologists was of "no help, detrimental, or not relevant to teachers." Berry (1975)

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* Paper presented at the Western Psychological Association's Convention, Honolulu, Hawaii, May, 1980.

also looked at the value to which teachers regarded psychological reports. His findings suggested that educators are greatly in favor of having a psychological report available when faced with decision-making about their students.

As yet, however, researchers have not examined the degree to which parents value psychological reports prepared by psychologists. The intent of the present study was to investigate and determine what expectations, concerns, and ideas parents have regarding psychological evaluations.

SUBJECTS

The sample consisted of 44 parents, either mothers or fathers, whose children were out-patients at the Marion Davies Children's Clinic, University of California, Los Angeles. The parents had brought their children to the Learning and Behavioral Disorders' section of the clinic for the purpose of obtaining a psychological evaluation for them. The evaluations are made by pre-doctoral psychology interns, who are supervised by faculty personnel. Prior to seeing the psychologist, the children are routinely given a general pediatric examination, and are then referred by the physician for the evaluation.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESCRIPTION, PROCEDURE, AND ANALYSIS

A 17 item questionnaire, a modification of versions developed by Moore, Boblitt, & Wildman (1968) and Berry (1975) was used. The questionnaire was administered to the sample at the conclusion of the evaluation, and following a summary conference at which time the results of the evaluation were presented to the parents. Response frequencies and percentages were calculated for each item of the questionnaire.

The results indicate that approximately 95% of the parents comprising the sample had previously sought professional

assistance for their child's learning and/or behavior problems or concerns. In additon, over half of this group had consulted with a psychologist at one time or another.

Generally, the parents tended to view the information they received from the psychological evaluation as most important and helpful for themselves, rather than for their child's school, physician, friends, siblings, or even the individual himself. They felt that the report provided information, suggestions, and/or techniques that they saw as being useful in helping them work with their child's particular problem. Approximately half of the same believed they would give equal creditability to the views offered about their offspring by persons representing various professional groups, while the remaining half tended to show a greater appreciation for the opinion of psychologists. A large percentage of the parents expressed pleasure with the evaluation. Their impressions were that the language used by the psychologists in giving them the information obtained during their child's evaluation was clear, and thus the data was easily understood.

In terms of the utilization of the information obtained from the evaluations, it seems the parents were most concerned with getting knowledge they would later find beneficial as they attempted to develop and implement strategies for their children. The majority of the subjects considered the evaluation helpful because it was able to diagnose the child's problem. The recommenations and suggestions part of the report was considered most significant in helping them collaborate with their children.

The primary reasons for the parents' involvement with the psychological evaluation were (1) because of their desire to know "why" their children were behaving as they were; and (2) to find ways they could help their children. Approximately two-thirds of the sample were pleased with the amount of information they

received from the evaluation, and they clearly (81.82%) did not feel that its length was correlated with its quality. However, there was little agreement regarding which parts of the psychological evaluation, with the exception of the test results and interpretation sections, generally received less emphasis and focus from teachers, counselors, physicians, etc.

In general, the parents were positive regarding their perceptions about the usefulness of having additional reports in aiding them as they make decisions concerning their child's future. The majority (54.55%) did not believe that modifications were needed in the psychological evaluations. With those expressing a need for such a change, the concern was with placing greater stress on providing detailed suggestions as to how the child could receive greater service from the parents.

DISCUSSION

By using a questionnaire that focused on parental impressions, the present study has gone beyond previous research which examined the views held by teachers and psychiatrists of psychological evaluations. The findings suggest the propositions that parents (1) explore many different services and professions as they attempt to help their child; (2) value the psychological reports because of the information they provide; and (3) show interest in learning ways in which they can help their child with his problems. The results are consistent with the data from Berry's (1975) study with teachers which indicated that the psychological evaluation is considered important in working with "problem" children, the information in the report is comprehensible, and the primary interest in the evaluation is to provide recommendations for and understanding of the child's behavior.

The findings of this study suggest several implications. First, professionals must assist parents in their endless search

to find answers to their children's problems. Unless psychologists and other professionals accurately inform parents of their conclusive findings, parents will continue to go from person to person attempting to find the "truth" about their child's problem.

Because the results clearly indicate a readiness and desire on the part of parents to be facilitators of change and to be actively involved in the process of remediation with their children, psychologists seem to have a captive audience with which to work. It appears that the public is not only passively seeking answers from professionals, but they want to assume an active role. Such a role will necessitate that the professional, e.g., the psychologist, give parents information and supply them with the strategies and remediation techniques that they can use. This issue might be relevant to the accountability issue if psychologists find themselves unable to supply these needs for parents.

Closely connected with the issue of accountability is the finding that parents no longer consider those in the medical profession to have a monopoly on knowledge. The results of this study appear to indicate that the psychologist is viewed favorably. This finding would suggest that psychologists must be skilled and competent so that they can assume the responsibility that obviously parents are expecting of them.

Finally, given the sample's overall satisfaction with the clarity, comprehension and perceived utility of the psychological evaluation, one might speculate that psychology training programs are providing their students with adequate training, at least as it relates to the competencies needed for preparing and implementing the psychological evaluation.

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